



Overhaul needed

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July 23, 2007

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan C. Crocker wrote that "the issue is whether we are a [State] Department and a [Foreign] Service at war." In a recently released cable from Mr. Crocker to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the new ambassador expressed his urgent concern about the difficulties he has encountered since arriving in Iraq. He further observed that "we need to organize and prioritize in a way that reflects this, something we have not done thus far."

In fact, our government has not seriously reviewed, organized, or prioritized our foreign-policy structures in decades. The National Security Act of 1947 turned 60 in this year, along with Arnold Schwarzenegger and David Letterman, India and Pakistan, the microwave oven and the frisbee.

As the technology that defines our everyday lives and popular culture has undergone profound change over the past six decades, the global security situation has been transformed. The rise of Islamists, who mix radical ideology, terrorist violence and modern technology, presents a new type of threat to U.S. national security. This adversary is ruthless, determined and adaptable. It is remarkable that, with all that has changed in the past 60 years, our government's national security structure remains largely as it was before the invention of the Internet and the cell phone.

Twenty-first-century global threats and challenges require a 21st-century U.S. foreign-policy apparatus. As Mr. Crocker's cable makes all too clear, it is time to modernize our tools for national security in the information age. With this in mind, I recently introduced two pieces of legislation that take steps toward developing a strategy and updating our foreign policy operations.

One is a foreign-affairs review. Every four years, the Department of Defense is required by law to submit a report analyzing our country's military doctrine, potential threats and strategic objectives. Because we live in a changing world and face an adaptable enemy, I believe the State Department should do likewise to ensure that our foreign-policy structure is modern and agile.

Mr. Crocker highlighted the need to ensure that we have the right personnel and the right numbers of personnel in place at our embassies to accomplish our national goals. At his request, the State Department conducted an extensive assessment of staffing and security issues and developed a plan to bring greater order to embassy personnel, beef up the political and economic sections, and make sure the embassy has greater control over staffing decisions. The 80-page report includes 88 recommendations. Why not conduct a similar but more regular review of the entire State Department?

That is why I have introduced the "Quadrennial Foreign Affairs Review Act" to require the Department of State to review all aspects of its organization and operations every four years. This legislation will help us to examine whether we have a coherent, focused foreign policy strategy, as well as the structure, programs, personnel and budget needed to implement it.

A second initiative would overhaul strategic communication. As we have learned on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan and other places where we have confronted terrorists, the fight against Islamist extremism cannot be won with guns alone. Our global struggle is just as much a war of ideas, and we are distressingly underequipped to wage that kind of war. In order to successfully engage in the war of ideas, we must be able to know the right message,

communicate it effectively and assess the results.

Strategic communication begins with understanding the factors that shape human behavior, mapping the networks of influence within societies and then finding the most effective methods and technologies to persuade. It is an enormous job that involves the collaborative work of all elements of our government — ranging from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce to the intelligence community and the judicial system.

But success also requires that we capitalize upon the knowledge, expertise, and skills of those outside of government. The "Strategic Communication Act" establishes a Center for Strategic Communication at the nexus of the public and private sectors to provide the government with information on global public opinion and technologies as well as the cultures, values and religions of foreign countries. It would also assist policy-makers in developing a communications strategy, informing national strategy and advising on how best to make decisions related to national security, foreign affairs, and diplomacy.

The National Security Act of 1947 served us well in the industrial age when we were up against the hierarchical Soviet Union; however, it no longer meets the needs of our information-age struggle against the agile, networked, non-state adversary of Islamist terrorism. The legislation I have introduced is not a complete solution, but these bills are two initial steps toward updating our foreign-policy tools for the 21st century.

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